Job Smart

Tips for staying employed

Alberta
HUMAN RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT
the people & workplace department

This book is written to help adults and youth succeed at work. It will help you:

- understand the importance that personal qualities have on keeping work
- explore the skills, knowledge and attitude necessary to maintain work
- determine what might interfere with attaining your goals
- explore strategies for problem-solving
- adopt behaviours that reflect a positive attitude about yourself and your work
- understand the value of taking responsibility for your actions
- connect with further information and resources.

This publication is available on-line through the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website, Alberta's leading on-line source for career, learning and employment information. To access this and additional publications, visit **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop**

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This information was accurate, to the best of our knowledge, at the time of printing. Labour market information and educational programs are subject to change, and you are encouraged to confirm with additional sources of information when making career, education and employment decisions.

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Introduction

Congratulations! The job interview went well and you got the job. Now you want to make sure you keep it! You will want to continue making the good impression you did during the job interview because keeping the job is just as important as getting it.

Is this book for you?

Job Smart: Tips for staying employed is a step-by-step guide to help you keep your job. It will:

- answer your questions about what your employer expects of you
- provide exercises to help you evaluate yourself as an employee
- give you advice on how to overcome some common workplace challenges.

To find out if this book is for you, ask yourself these questions:

- Have I had several jobs in the past that didn't last very long?
- Have I left a job because of a disagreement with a supervisor or co-worker?
- Have I received feedback about having a poor attitude, not being on time for work, or not being a team player?
- Have I had to turn down work or leave a new job because of personal issues in my life (e.g., childcare, transportation, substance abuse or health issues)?
- Do I find jobs where I feel over- or under-qualified?
- Do I feel burnt-out, scared or unsure of my abilities at work?
- Do I see a pattern repeating in my employment history but feel unable to change it?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, this book is for you.

Why does keeping a job matter?

We all know why employers want employees they can keep. If they find hardworking, loyal employees, the work gets done well and often faster—and that means continued business for them. But this book is about you, the employee. So, why does keeping a job matter to **you**? The following are some strong reasons to keep a job. Which ones are important to you?

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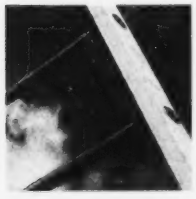
- **A sense of pride.**
  Doing a job well can increase your confidence in yourself and in your skills. And knowing you contribute to a team can give you a sense of accomplishment and pride.
- **A steady paycheque.**
  It's no secret that knowing where your next paycheque is coming from is a major reason for keeping a job. You need money to support yourself and your family, so a regular paycheque is very important. Keeping a job can lead to financial independence and less stress about money problems.
- **Increased chance of job advancement.**
  Keeping a job for months or years gives you time to learn to do the job well and prove that you can be an asset to the business. This could lead to a promotion, new job responsibilities or an increase in your salary.
- **A good reference from your employer if you decide to change jobs.**
  In today's labour market, people change jobs more than ever before. Working at one company for several years looks good on a résumé. And, chances are, if your employer has kept you on that long, he or she will give you a positive recommendation if you decide it's time to try something new.
- **Opportunities to develop personal or technical skills.**
  Keeping a job can also mean opportunities to learn new skills. This could mean on-the-job training or attending a workshop. If you've been working in your job for some time, your employer is more likely to invest time or money in your training.

Becoming job smart—what does it mean?

Employees who are job smart understand what it takes to keep a job. They respect their employers and co-workers and do their part to make their workplace a positive one. Being job smart also provides a sense of security. That doesn't necessarily mean you'll have this job for the rest of your life, but it does mean you will have the skills to keep a job. And if this job ends, you can be confident in your ability to find and keep a job again.



The next few pages are designed to help you identify the job smart skills you have and those you may choose to work on.

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What do Employers want?

Do you know what employers expect from you? Below are 13 qualities employers say make a valued employee. Valued employees:

1. have good attendance records. They show up for every shift they are scheduled for.
2. are on time, whether it's showing up for work, returning from breaks, going to staff meetings or completing tasks.
3. call if they know they will be late or if they are unable to make it in to work—but they don't abuse this privilege.
4. dress appropriately for the type of work they are hired to do.
5. have a positive attitude and show enthusiasm about their job.
6. are prepared. They come to work willing to do the job, pay attention and follow directions.
7. work safely and are healthy. They come to work substance-free. This includes not using alcohol or drugs and making sure that over-the-counter medications don't interfere with their ability to do their job.
8. ask if they don't understand something.
9. are open to learning new personal and technical skills. This includes taking responsibility for mistakes.
10. are team players. They work well with others to achieve a common goal.
11. take initiative. If they see something needs to be done, they do it. They don't wait for someone to ask them to do it.
12. are honest and trustworthy.
13. are knowledgeable about the company.

How many of these qualities describe you at work? Are there any areas where you could improve? Write them here so you can refer back to this section later.

You may think these qualities only matter to your employer. But they don't. They matter to you too. The following chart explains how.

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Why being a valued employee matters

Valued employees ...	Why it matters to employers ...	Why it matters to you ...
Have good attendance records. They show up for every shift they are scheduled for.	If you don't show up for work, it puts pressure on your employer to find someone to cover your shift. Or, your employer may think you've abandoned your job and may replace you.	Having a good attendance record shows you care about keeping your job. It also shows you are dependable.
Are on time, whether it's showing up for work, returning from breaks, going to staff meetings or completing tasks.	Time is money. Being late 10 minutes each day may not seem like much to you, but in a week, that equals an hour of work time. Delays in production and service can cause the business to lose customers or even close.	Being on time and meeting deadlines can help you keep your job.
Call if they know they will be late or if they are unable to make it in to work—but they don't abuse this privilege.	Calling if you will be late or absent allows your supervisor time to find a replacement or re-distribute work.	Calling if you will be late or absent is just good manners. It shows you care about your employer and co-workers and want to help them prepare for your absence.
Dress appropriately for the type of work they are hired to do.	What employees wear and how they present themselves to customers and clients reflects on the business. By looking professional, you're helping your employer and the business to be seen as professional.	Every day you make impressions on people. Show that you are confident and care about yourself by wearing clothing that is clean and appropriate for your job.

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Valued employees ...	Why it matters to employers ...	Why it matters to you ...
Have a positive attitude and show enthusiasm about their job.	Positive attitudes contribute to a positive work environment for everyone. Like your clothing, your attitude reflects on your employer and the business. If you have a negative attitude, customers and clients may see you—and the organization—as unprofessional and take their business elsewhere.	We all like working with people who are positive about their work and the people around them.
Are prepared. They come to work willing to do the job, pay attention and follow directions.	Employers value employees who are prepared and get their work done. That's why they hired you.	By showing you can pay attention and follow directions, you're proving you can do the job. This can increase your confidence in your ability to become a valued member of the work team.
Work safely and are healthy. They come to work substance-free. This includes not using alcohol or drugs and making sure that over-the-counter medications don't interfere with their ability to do their job.	Employees who use substances are an important workplace health and safety concern for the employer. They are a danger to themselves and to their co-workers. Their behaviour leads to lost time in productivity and in injuries that result from their carelessness.	Being substance-free makes it easier to focus on tasks and keeps you and your co-workers safe on the job.
Ask if they don't understand something.	Employers would prefer you asked and did the job right the first time rather than do the task wrong and find out how to do it right later. Time is money.	By asking questions, you show you're interested and want to do a good job.

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Valued employees ...	Why it matters to employers ...	Why it matters to you ...
Are open to learning new personal and technical skills. That includes taking responsibility for mistakes.	Change is constant—whether it's a new computer system or an idea about how to do things differently. Employers need workers who are willing to learn and adapt to change. Taking responsibility for mistakes shows that you are willing to learn the right way to do the job.	Learning is a survival skill. Not only can learning new skills help you succeed in your current job but knowing the latest skills can also help you if you decide to look for a new job. Sometimes we learn by trial and error—but we only learn from our mistakes if we take responsibility for them.
Are team players. They work well with others to achieve a common goal.	Employees who work well together ensure that tasks are completed faster and often more efficiently.	Being part of a team is a good feeling. It also contributes to a more pleasant work environment for everyone.
Take initiative. If they see that something needs to be done, they do it. They don't wait for someone to ask them to do it.	Employers appreciate employees who offer to help. With so much work to be done, employers need people who will act rather than wait to be told what to do.	Sometimes taking initiative will mean you get to do new tasks that you really like to do. Or it might mean that you get something done when things are slow so that the busy times are less stressful.
Are honest and trustworthy.	Employers have to trust employees with their business. That means handling money, opening and closing the shop, or just getting things done when the employer is not there. They need to know the people they hire are reliable.	We often expect to be treated in the way we treat others. Wouldn't you want others to be honest with you? Don't you want to be able to trust them?
Are knowledgeable about the company.	Employees represent the company to the public so employers value staff who are able to speak positively and knowledgeably about the company to others.	Knowing your role and how you fit into the company can help you do your job better and understand the pressures that other people are facing.

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Assess your personal and work skills

Knowing what employers expect of you is Step One. Rating yourself as an employee is Step Two. Try this exercise.

At work, I consider myself to be:

Yes	Sometimes	No	
			Hardworking
			I get tasks done on time.
			If business or my workload slows down, I look for other tasks I can do until things get busy again.
			Enthusiastic
			I have a positive attitude at work.
			I am eager to learn new skills and tasks.
			I want to learn more about the organization I work for.
			I ask questions.
			Dependable
			I show up for every shift I am scheduled for.
			I get to work on time.
			I don't take longer breaks than I am entitled to.
			I finish tasks I am given.
			Helpful
			I offer help if others need it.
			I look for ways to be part of the team.

Showing up is important—An Employer's Story

A manufacturer in Red Deer, who hires unskilled workers and trains them on the job, takes pride in recruiting young workers and offering them their first well-paying job.

"My biggest frustration is people who don't show up," he said. "I hired one young man who had real talent, but he missed 29 days out of his first 67 days on the job. He left me with no choice but to let him go. I'm pretty flexible but how could we work anything out if he didn't show up?"

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Yes	Sometimes	No	
			Friendly
			I make an effort to meet new people.
			I enjoy talking with co-workers during breaks or at lunch.
			I provide polite and respectful service to my customers.
			Able to work well with others.
			I am a team player.
			I know how to work in a team to get the job done.
			I treat my co-workers with respect.
			Professional
			I dress appropriately for my job.
			I speak positively about my employer, my co-workers and customers.
			I am honest and trustworthy.
			I am clean and well groomed when I arrive at work.

If you answered mostly "yes," you have a good idea of what it takes to stay employed. Do you think your employer would agree with your self-assessment?

If you answered "sometimes" to any of the work or personal skills above, then you're on the right track. Try doing those things more often so you can check "yes" next time.

If you answered "no" to any of the skills above, take a closer look and ask yourself why. How is this affecting your work? If you've had trouble keeping a job in the past, could this be a reason?

Importance of a positive attitude—An Employer's Story

"Education, experience, knowledge and personal suitability are factors our company takes into account when we hire tradespeople, construction workers and support staff," said the manager of transportation services for a utilities company in Alberta.

"An individual with good personal skills can always learn the technical side of the job. The employees who stand out the most have great attitudes toward the company, are comfortable working with minimal supervision, are safety conscious, and are full of energy."

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Making Positive changes

Now that you've identified some areas where you may want to improve, identify the reason why that skill is a challenge for you. Write down the areas where you answered "sometimes" or "no" under "Personal or Work Skill". Think about why that's true for you and explain in more detail under "Reason".

Example:

Personal or Work Skill	Reason
It is a challenge for me to show up for every shift.	I have children and my childcare provider is unreliable.

Use the spaces below.

Personal or Work Skill	Reason
It is a challenge for me to	
It is a challenge for me to	
It is a challenge for me to	

Keep these in mind as you read the next section "How are your problem-solving skills?" It's designed to help you come up with ways to face workplace challenges and improve your job smart skills.

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How are your problem-solving skills?

There's no such thing as a job without challenges. It's how you choose to deal with those challenges that matter. Below are some examples of challenges that you could face on the job. How would you handle the situation? Write down your answer on the lines below each example and see how it compares to our suggestions.

Sample Challenge 1 **Late for work**

Mark has been having trouble getting to work on time for the last few weeks. He does his best to get his three kids off to day care and school each day, but sometimes things happen. Like when his four-year-old daughter had a tantrum at the breakfast table and spilled her juice down the front of his shirt. Not a good start to the day. Because he had to change clothes, Mark ended up being 10 minutes late for work—for the second time this week. What could he do?

Possible Solution:

Some suggestions:

Mark could try to feed the kids before he gets dressed so there is no chance of spills getting on his work clothes. This could mean getting up 15 minutes earlier. He also might want to keep a clean shirt at work for emergencies. Mark could also talk to his supervisor. By letting his supervisor know he is a single dad and is responsible for getting his kids off to school in the morning, it helps his supervisor understand why he is sometimes late. Without an explanation, his supervisor might think he doesn't care about being on time. Mark could describe what a typical morning is like for him and let his supervisor know how much those extra minutes in the morning would mean to him.

Maybe there's a way Mark's supervisor can change Mark's work schedule to have him start later in the morning, or perhaps work later afternoon or evening shifts. Mark and his supervisor might be able to work out an arrangement where he could come in 15 minutes later in the morning and stay 15 minutes later at the end of the day or take a shorter lunch break.

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Sample Challenge 2 **Problem with a co-worker**

Lien is having a problem with a co-worker. They just don't seem to get along. Lien gets upset when her co-worker points out her mistakes to everyone nearby, like the time Lien was trying to use the cash register and it got jammed. Lien believes her co-worker treats her this way because she doesn't like her. What could she do?

Possible Solution:

Some suggestions:

Lien could talk to her co-worker about her concerns. She could pick a time when they both have a private moment to talk. It's important for Lien not to yell or get angry. That will only make the problem worse. She could tell her co-worker how she felt when she spoke loudly about the cash register. Lien shouldn't blame the person, but she needs to explain her feelings in a polite but firm way. She could try something like: "I felt embarrassed when you were fixing the cash register and talking loudly about what I had done to jam it." After talking with the co-worker, if the problem still exists, Lien could discuss her concern with her supervisor. She could tell her supervisor that she tried to resolve the problem with the co-worker and then let her supervisor handle the situation from there.

Sample Challenge 3 **Too much work to do**

Antonio enjoys his job in the mailroom but lately he's been feeling swamped. Whenever he turns around, someone needs a letter tracked down, something mailed out with a rush delivery, or more mail comes in and needs to be sorted and delivered. He's trying his best to keep up but it's been getting hard to keep on top of everything. In fact, some things have slipped through the cracks. Antonio feels terrible and wants to do better. But he can't keep working through his lunch break to get things done and staying up at night thinking about things he may have forgotten to do. What could he do?

Possible Solution:

Some suggestions:

Antonio could talk to his supervisor. Being busy is one thing, but being constantly overloaded might indicate a problem. If he's stressed out at work and rushing to get things done, a mistake could happen. It's natural to worry about his supervisor's reaction, but Antonio should explain that he can do the job but the pace is too difficult for one person to manage. Most employers will be happy he came to them before a major problem occurred and will try to improve the work environment. That could mean watching Mario do his work and making some suggestions, reassigning some tasks to another person or hiring more help in the mailroom at busier times.

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Sample Challenge 4 **Dealing with a supervisor who isn't easy to talk to**

Karen is having trouble talking to her supervisor about how she feels about her job and about their relationship. She doesn't think her supervisor likes her work. Although Karen's tried to talk informally to her about the problem several times, her supervisor never seems to have the time or interest. What could Karen do?

Possible Solution:

Some suggestions:

Since Karen has tried to talk to her supervisor several times and had no success, perhaps she needs to be more assertive. The problem will only become bigger if she doesn't do something about it now. She could try to schedule a meeting with her supervisor instead of trying to speak informally. If meeting with her supervisor doesn't improve things, Karen could try talking to her co-workers to see if they have any ideas about how she could work better with her supervisor. She could also try talking to the manager of the department or perhaps someone in Human Resources if she is unable to resolve the situation herself. If Karen still sees no change, she may want to think about moving to a position where she reports to someone else.

Sample Challenge 5 **Having trouble keeping up with new technology**

Chris has just re-entered the workforce after a long period of time and he's having trouble keeping up with the new technology. Computers, computers, computers. How will he ever learn it all? He's starting to feel stressed and it's beginning to affect his work. What could he do?

Possible Solution:

Some suggestions:

Chris could talk to his supervisor about some extra training courses he may be able to take to upgrade his skills. By taking ownership of the problem and coming up with a solution, Chris's supervisor will see that Chris is sincere about learning the skills he needs to do the job more effectively.

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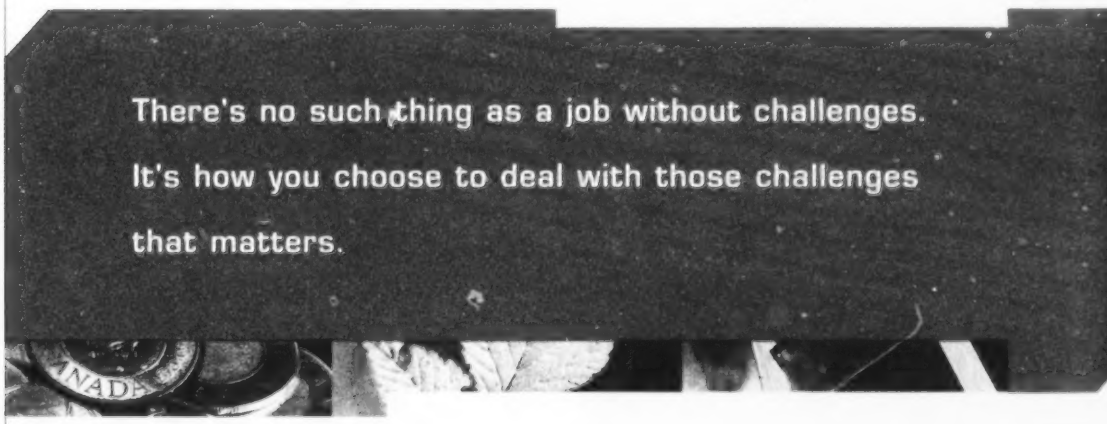
Sample Challenge 6 **Asking for time off work for a personal issue**

Maria's last employer fired her for abandoning her job. She didn't mean to abandon it—in fact she didn't think that she had. Maria comes from a large Aboriginal family in northern Alberta and when someone from home dies, she is expected to attend the funeral. Traditional funerals in her community can last for days and that often doesn't include travel time from the city back home. Recently her uncle passed away. What could Maria do to make sure she doesn't lose this job?

Possible Solution:

Some suggestions:

Maria could ask her supervisor about the policy regarding Bereavement Leave to understand who is considered an immediate relative and the length of time allowed for leave. She might be able to negotiate the length of time off using a combination of bereavement leave, holiday time or unpaid time. Or she might decide which aspect of the funeral (the wake, the service or the reception) she could take part in. Maria could explain to her family the importance of this job to her and her family. She could tell them that her employer is showing respect for her and her family by giving her time off and that she also needs to show respect to her employer by not taking too much time. She could explain that she needs to balance her personal life and her work life. Maria may be able to show respect and help her family members in other ways, such as sending flowers, food or money for the service instead of personally attending.



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Sample Challenge 7 **Dealing with Sexual Harassment**

Verna's supervisor was too friendly to all the women at work. He stood too close to them and touched them in inappropriate ways. Her co-workers warned her about him when she started. One night when she was working late he touched her in a way that made her feel uncomfortable. He said if she told anyone she could lose her job. What could Verna do?

Possible Solution:

Some suggestions:

Verna shouldn't ignore the way she is feeling. She should tell her boss to stop and if he continues that she will report him to the manager, the union or the employee association. She could even write him a letter telling him to stop and keep a copy of the letter for herself in case she chooses to file a complaint with the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. Her complaint must be made within 12 months of the alleged incident or the Commission is unable to investigate.

If you need to make a complaint...

Some challenges in the workplace can be very serious and should be dealt with as soon as possible. If you need to make a complaint, remember, some laws and regulations are time-sensitive, which means that you only have a certain number of days to make a complaint. The people in organizations such as unions, employee associations, Employment Standards offices and the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission must follow those guidelines. You may be unable to pursue a complaint if you allow these deadlines to pass. For more information on these organizations, see the Resource section at the end of this book.

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Is a personal problem preventing you from keeping a job?

Sometimes the challenges we face in our personal lives can affect our jobs. Anger management problems, substance abuse, and lack of childcare or transportation are some examples. To determine if a personal problem is preventing you from keeping a job, start by asking yourself these questions:

- Have you recently had an outburst of anger at work? Do you want help to control your temper?
- Do you have a personal issue that is causing you to be late or absent from your job on a regular basis (e.g. drug or alcohol use, problems arranging childcare or trouble finding transportation to work)?
- Do you suffer from depression or another medical condition that is affecting your job?
- Do you feel pressure from debts piling up or from exceptional or unplanned expenses?

These problems can be serious. If a personal problem is affecting your job, **now** is the time to do something about it.

Where should you start?

First, consider improving the situation on your own. Try these steps:

- Take a minute to relax. Take a couple of deep breaths. This will help slow your heart rate and you will begin to calm down.
- Think about the problem. Write it down if that helps.
- Brainstorm some possible solutions. You might want to ask a friend or family member for help.
- Think about each solution. Can you see yourself doing it? If not, why not?
- Divide a piece of paper in half and think about the good and bad points of each solution.
- Choose one solution to try first.
- Break it down into smaller steps so you can see how the plan will work.
- Take action, one step at a time.

For example, let's say you found a great job but it's outside of the city you live in. It would take 20 minutes to get there by car—but that's the problem—you don't have a car.

Step One:

Relax. Try the deep breathing we mentioned.

Step Two:

Think about the problem and write it down: *I found a great job but I don't have transportation to get there.*

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Step Three:
Brainstorm possible solutions. Examples:

- Research buses and bus routes in your area.
- Borrow a car from a friend or family member.
- Ask the employer how he or she gets to work.
- Ask the employer if there are any co-workers who live in your area that you may be able to arrange to carpool with.
- See if there is a neighbour, friend or family member you could carpool with.

Step Four:
Make a list of good and bad points about the solutions you came up with. For example:

- For borrowing a car from a friend or family member:
  Good: You can drive yourself to work and don't have to rely on someone else.
  Bad: You may not be able to relax knowing the car does not belong to you.
- For carpooling with a co-worker:
  Good: You get to work. You make a new friend. You save on gas between the two of you. Carpooling is better for the environment.
  Bad: You could have to walk or take a bus in the cold to get to your meeting place each morning.

Step Five:
Choose one solution to try first. For example, you decide to see if it is possible to carpool with a co-worker who lives nearby.

Step Six:
Break down the solution into smaller steps so you can see how the plan will work. For example:

- Talk to your co-worker about the idea of carpooling. Make the idea attractive by offering to pay half the money for gas. Agree to re-evaluate the agreement at a later date—for example a month from now—to make sure this arrangement still works for both of you.
- If the co-worker agrees, decide on a place and time that is convenient to meet.
- Test your route to the meeting place the night before to make sure you will be there on time and won't miss your ride.
- Arrange to call the co-worker in the morning to let him or her know you will be at the meeting place at the agreed time.
- Investigate other options throughout your month-long trial period in case this arrangement doesn't work out, or in case your co-worker is sick and can't pick you up one morning. Remember, you still need a back-up plan so you can make it to work.

Step Seven:
Take action.

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Now that you know the steps to problem solving, think back to the personal or work skills you wrote down at the beginning of this section. How can you use the steps to help you face your workplace challenge?

Example:

Personal or Work Skill	Reason	Solution
It is a challenge for me to show up for every shift.	*I have children and my childcare provider is unreliable.*	*My sister is able to look after my children after school until I pick them up after work.*

List your challenges and reasons, this time with solutions.

Personal or Work Skill	Reason	Solution
It is a challenge for me to		
It is a challenge for me to		
It is a challenge for me to		

You're on your way to solving the problem when you:

- take responsibility for personal issues
- ask for help
- do research
- want to make a change.

Good for you! Solving a problem on your own is not always easy. Feel proud and give yourself a pat on the back.

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Not all personal or workplace problems can be solved alone, though. Some may be too difficult, so don't be afraid to ask for help. Start with people you trust, like your friends and family. What the problem is may determine whom you need to talk to—maybe it's your employer, a co-worker or a counsellor.

Refer to the Resource section at the end of this book for more places to ask for help.

Facing a personal issue head-on

Hui's story

Hui recently graduated from high school and moved to Lethbridge to find work. He was hired at the first job he applied for—working at one of the most popular fast food restaurants in the city. The job was perfect for him since he liked the fast pace and enjoyed working with the public. Sometimes, though, he would get angry if customers had problems with their orders or if his co-workers made mistakes and he had to take the heat. Once Hui threw a salt-shaker and it hit the wall. He didn't mean to get so angry. It just happened. Another time he yelled at a co-worker and made her cry. He apologized to her later but still felt terrible about what he did.

Hui recognized his angry outbursts were beginning to affect his work, and he wanted to change. He did some research and found out about an anger management support group offered by his local hospital. Hui began going to meetings twice a week and found it helpful to talk to other people who had difficulty controlling their tempers. He took the tips he learned at the sessions and put them into action. When faced with a stressful situation on the job, Hui learned how important it is to breathe and take a time out. It was difficult for him at first, but he soon got the hang of it and found he was able to control his outbursts.

Today Hui is a much happier person because he was able to get help managing his anger. He uses the skills he learned through the support program both at work and in his personal life.

Why this works

Hui's job may have been on shaky ground if he hadn't recognized his outbursts at work were becoming a problem. He followed the steps we told you about earlier to solve the problem. He identified the problem, he researched solutions, and he took action by using small steps first. Today, Hui is doing well and is now an assistant manager of the restaurant.

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Who can help

If you decide to talk to your supervisor about the personal problem that is affecting your work, choose a time when your supervisor is not busy and has time to talk to you. Be prepared to discuss not only the problem but also possible solutions. Bring a list of possible solutions you have come up with and let your supervisor know about any actions you have taken to improve your situation. Ask for your supervisor's help in resolving your situation.

Your employer may not want or be able to help you. Don't be discouraged if that happens. Not all employers will have the time or the interest to help you. Be brief when explaining your personal problem. In other words, don't tell your life story. Identify the problem and tell your supervisor the steps you've tried to resolve the problem and how that has helped. Then ask your supervisor for the help you would like from him or her, and explain how you think it will make a difference.

You may not feel comfortable talking to your supervisor if your problem is more personal (such as substance abuse or problems at home). Consider talking to a personal counsellor. Counsellors can help by offering support, directing you to other professionals, or just offering an ear to listen.

There's help available. Just ask Maggie, who's story is next. She's recovering from substance abuse and knows how personal problems can make it difficult to keep a job. Today she's grateful to be working at a job she enjoys, making her own money and supporting her family.

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Overcoming personal challenges

Maggie's story

Maggie is a single mother of two who has spent most of her adult life moving from job to job—everything from working as a waitress to cleaning houses and babysitting. Finding a better paying job was often difficult for Maggie because she had dropped out of school in the seventh grade. And when she did find a job, the challenges of being a single mother with an addiction often prevented her from keeping it.

Maggie wasn't happy, so she decided to make changes in her life. Her goal was to become a rehabilitation therapist, so that's just what she did. First she dealt with her substance abuse issues so that she could be successful in school. Then after completing high school, Maggie earned a college diploma in rehabilitation therapy. She soon found that the field of rehabilitation therapy was not for her and she began to feel burned out. She took some time to re-evaluate her job priorities. With the help of Alberta Job Corps, Maggie was hired at an auto parts wholesaler in Edmonton. So far she's received two raises since she began working there and is very happy in her job.

This is her advice for others who may be having trouble keeping a job: "Consider seeking counselling if a personal problem is preventing you from finding job success. There's nothing to be embarrassed or scared about."

Why this works

Maggie is succeeding at her new job because she had the courage to make some major changes in her life. First, she got help for her substance abuse. This didn't happen overnight. Sometimes it was a real struggle but she didn't give up. Then, she came up with a plan of action for the type of work she wanted and went for it. Her first choice didn't work out, but now Maggie has a job she enjoys. She supports her family, is more self-confident, and has a strong sense of independence.

In addition to Maggie's substance abuse problem, she also faced another barrier to finding and keeping a good job—her lack of education. Because Maggie had dropped out of school in the seventh grade, she needed to upgrade her skills and finish high school before she could pursue the work she wanted.

For more information about counselling services and information about education and training options, refer to the Resource section at the end of this book.

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What do Employees want?

Surveys show employees want a job where:

- they get paid a fair wage
- they feel safe
- the workplace practices are fair
- there is thanks and recognition for their contributions
- the work is meaningful
- they have the resources they need to do their work
- their opinions are heard
- the people are positive.

How does your job rate? Answer "yes" or "no" to the following questions.

Yes	No	
____	____	Are you paid for the work you do with a regular paycheque? Is the wage rate reasonable?
____	____	Do you feel safe at work? Does your employer follow safety guidelines and provide safety training to employees (e.g. conduct fire drills, provide safety manuals)?
____	____	Are the workplace practices at your job fair? Are workers treated with respect?
____	____	Does your supervisor recognize and thank you and your co-workers for the work you do? Have you been recognized for going the extra mile on a project or finishing work before a deadline?
____	____	Does the work you do mean something to you? Does it make a difference in your life or in the lives of others?
____	____	Does your employer provide you with all the resources (equipment, tools, supplies) you need to do your job?
____	____	Are you able to say what's on your mind and be heard by others? Do you feel your ideas and opinions matter to your employer?
____	____	Do your supervisor and your co-workers have positive attitudes?

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If you didn't answer "yes" to all of the previous questions, the next section can help you find ways you can help create the type of workplace you want.

Contribute to a positive workplace

There are lots of ways you can help make your workplace a better place to work. Start with these ideas:

- develop positive relationships with your supervisor and co-workers
- put your best foot forward
- communicate with confidence
- stay positive.

Develop positive workplace relationships

When employers say they want an employee who is a team player, they mean someone who works well with others and is comfortable contributing to team efforts. In order to succeed at your job, one of the most important things for you to do is develop positive working relationships with your supervisor, your co-workers and your customers or clients. That doesn't mean you have to become friends with everyone you work with—if you do, consider that a bonus—but make an effort to be friendly and positive.

Here are some tips to help you develop positive workplace relationships.

- Be friendly, be polite and smile.
- Listen to others when they are speaking.
- Make small talk about current events or the weather, but avoid sharing personal problems or gossiping about staff or supervisors.
- Offer assistance to your co-workers if they need it.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Avoid complaining about your job.
- Avoid dating co-workers.

Sometimes you'll find that despite your best efforts, not everyone you work with will have a positive attitude. Don't let others bring you down. Continue to stay positive and focus on the tasks at hand.

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Put your best foot forward

Your personal presentation is the first thing others notice about you and can set the tone for your working relationship. Remember to shower regularly, use deodorant, brush your teeth, wash and comb your hair, and have clean hands.

The way you dress is also important. That doesn't mean you need to spend a fortune on a new wardrobe, but your clothes should be appropriate for the work you do. You can find good bargains at second-hand or consignment clothing stores. As long as the clothes are clean and neat, you'll make a positive impression. Remember, your employer expects you to represent the company in a positive way, so clothes that are too short or too tight should not be worn to work.

Communicate with confidence

Communication problems often lead to relationships breaking down. This includes the relationship you have with your employer and your co-workers. Knowing how to communicate effectively is an important skill to have both on and off the job.

To help yourself communicate better, follow these tips.

- Relax.
- Think before you speak.
- Speak clearly and confidently.
- Make eye contact with the person you are speaking to.
- Smile.

Listening is an equally important part of communicating effectively. To help yourself listen better, follow these tips.

- Pay attention.
- Show interest in what the person is saying.
- Let the person who is talking finish what he or she is trying to say. In other words, don't cut them off.
- Stay focused.
- Ask questions if you don't understand or if you need to clarify something.
- Listen to the person's tone of voice to help you understand the message.

Knowing when to be light hearted and funny and when to be serious is also a good skill to learn. When you enter a room, take note of the atmosphere before making a joke. Humour is not appropriate for every situation.

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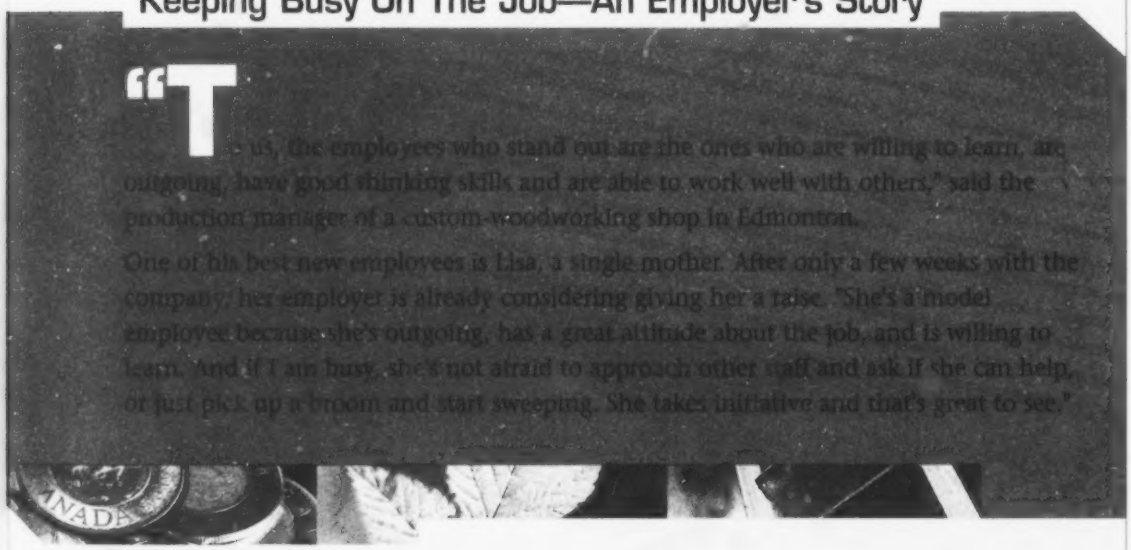
Stay positive

Many people spend between 20 and 45 hours per week at their job, so why not make it as positive an experience as possible? Your attitude says a lot about you. In fact, a positive attitude can often be a determining factor in whether or not your employer chooses to keep you on. Show your employer you care about your job and that things are going well in a way the fits your own personality.

Here are some tips on staying positive at work.

- Focus on the good things that happen during the day.
- Get your work done.
- Help a co-worker.
- Apologize if you make a mistake.
- Take assigned breaks to stay rejuvenated.
- Smile.

Keeping Busy On The Job—An Employer's Story



"T

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One of his best new employees is Lisa, a single mother. After only a few weeks with the company, her employer is already considering giving her a raise. "She's a model employee because she's outgoing, has a great attitude about the job, and is willing to learn. And if I am busy, she's not afraid to approach other staff and ask if she can help, or just pick up a broom and start sweeping. She takes initiative and that's great to see."

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Good Employer/Employee Relationships

Katrina's Story

Katrina is a 31-year-old who describes herself as "eccentric." She likes to dress in "punk style" and has a nose ring—a look that some of her previous employers have had a problem with. But not the supervisor she has now.

Today, Katrina works full-time in a metal cleaning and polishing shop in Edmonton. She has a variety of responsibilities—everything from cleaning and polishing metal to organizing merchandise and preparing orders for customers. The variety of work is one of the things Katrina enjoys most about her job. And the fact she gets along with her supervisor, has weekends off, and is making more money now doesn't hurt either.

Katrina is also grateful that her current supervisor understands that she has health problems and may sometimes need to be away from work. She has asthma. In the past, she lost jobs because her employers didn't understand the severity of her condition. But that's all changed now, and Katrina is happy to admit she likes going to work. She also has more self-confidence now and encourages other people who are having trouble establishing a 'good fit' with an employer not to give up. "Talk to your supervisor about your concerns and work out an arrangement that you are both comfortable with," she says.

Why this works

Katrina's relationship with her current employer works for a number of reasons. First, they have good communication. Katrina is able to talk to her employer about her unique appearance and her asthma condition. Most importantly she was able to show him that they wouldn't interfere with her ability to do the job. Her employer understands her situation because she talked to him about it and he has seen that it doesn't affect her work.

Katrina's positive attitude about her job is also a determining factor in her ability to keep her job. She likes her job and takes pride in doing it well. This helps create a good working environment for everyone around her. Having worked at several jobs that she didn't find challenging or rewarding, Katrina appreciates the job she has now—and it shows.

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Katrina's positive attitude about her job is also a determining factor in her ability to keep her job. She likes her job and takes pride in doing it well. This helps create a good working environment for everyone around her. Having worked at several jobs that she didn't find challenging or rewarding, Katrina appreciates the job she has now—and it shows.

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Finding a 'good fit' with an employer

Finding an employer that is a good fit for you is very important when you're looking for a job to keep. By good fit, we mean an employer who:

- appreciates the skills you have to offer and helps you develop new skills
- shares your positive attitude about the job
- makes you feel comfortable enough to communicate with—especially about personal issues that may affect your job (e.g. children's appointments, health problems, cultural issues)

Determining what you want in a job is just as important as understanding what employers want in you as an employee. If your job meets all or most of the points we told you about in the beginning of this section, consider yourself lucky. Not everyone can say the same.

To keep the job you have, continue developing your job smart skills and don't be afraid to look for ways to exceed your employer's expectations. If there's a project you can volunteer to help with, do it. If a co-worker is away from work and you see your employer is in a tough spot, jump in and offer to help. If you see an opportunity for training or education that you think will help you do your job better, tell your supervisor about it.

By going the extra mile, you're showing your employer you want to continue on the road of employment

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Resources

Looking for more information on career planning, researching education and training options, or information on looking for work?

Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS)

Visit the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website at **www.alis.gov.ab.ca**. ALIS is Alberta's on-line source for career, learning and employment information. You'll find the resources you need for making the most of your future. This includes print, audio and video career and workplace related resources. Visit **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop** for more information or to view on-line.

You can also view or pick up copies at any Alberta Human Resources and Employment service centre. Many of the publications are available free of charge to Alberta and NWT residents.

Alberta Career Information Hotline

Contact the Alberta Career Information Hotline for answers to your questions about:

- career planning
- occupations
- job search skills
- education and training options
- information and referrals.

Phone: 1-800-661-3753 toll-free in Alberta
Phone: (780) 422-4266 in Edmonton

Access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing:
1-800-232-7215 for message relay service or (780) 422-5283 for TDD service

E-mail: hotline@alis.gov.ab.ca
Website: **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/hotline**

Alberta Human Resources and Employment service centres

Alberta Human Resources and Employment service centres are located throughout the province. They have information on occupations, career options, education programs and funding, and finding work. Many offices have a career resource centre with books, newspapers, magazines, and software and audio/visual materials. They may also have computers for Internet use and word processing, and phones and fax machines to use with your work search. You can also talk to a career and employment consultant. These services may be offered by other agencies in your community. Call the Alberta Career Information Hotline for the office closest to you.

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Want to improve your reading or writing skills?

Adult Literacy Programs can help. Contact the Literacy Help Line at 1-800-767-3231 for a list of programs available in your area. Or look under Learn in the yellow pages.

Need help finding childcare for your family while you are at work? Looking for information on childcare subsidy programs that are available?

Alberta Children's Services can help.

They have information on finding quality childcare. Check out their website at **www.child.gov.ab.ca** for information on day cares in your community and questions to ask to find the right care for your child.

The Childcare Subsidy Program helps low-income Alberta families with childcare costs. It applies to pre-school age children who are attending licensed day care facilities or approved family day homes. The program is operated by the Ministry of Childrens' Services and administered by your Child and Family Service Authority. For more information, contact your local Child and Family Services Authority or visit **www.child.gov.ab.ca**.

What type of financial support is there for working parents?

Alberta Adult Health Benefit

The Alberta Adult Health Benefit allows parents who find a job and no longer receive financial benefits through the Supports for Independence (SFI) program to keep their health benefits, subject to an annual review based on their net income. To qualify, parents must have dependent children and must notify their Alberta Human Resources and Employment worker that they are leaving SFI for employment.

Alberta Child Health Benefit

The Alberta Child Health Benefit (ACHB) program is part of Alberta's role in the National Child Benefit - a series of programs designed to address child poverty in Canada. The ACHB is a premium-free health benefit plan that provides dental, optical, emergency ambulance, essential diabetic supplies and prescription drug coverage for children living in families with low incomes. For more information on the Alberta Child Health Benefit (ACHB), contact the call centre at 1-877-469-5437(1-877-4MY-KIDS) or visit the website at **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/achb**

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Need help managing financial pressures?

If you are having trouble meeting your financial obligations, talk to your creditors. You may be able to consolidate your debts or take steps to avoid serious financial problems.

Talk to someone you know and whose financial management skills you respect. If appropriate, contact your bank or credit union and ask about obtaining financial advice. Or, contact a not-for-profit consumer debt counselling service such as the Credit Counselling Services of Alberta. Check out their website at **www.creditcounselling.com** or call 1-888-294-0076, 265-2201 in Calgary or 423-5265 in Edmonton.

Need help with a substance abuse problem?

Contact your family doctor for a referral to a counsellor or therapist in your area. Your local hospital may also be able to help, or try contacting your Regional Health Authority for assistance.

You can also refer to your yellow pages under Counselling Services for a list of professionals who may be able to help you.

Contact the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) for help. AADAC is an agency funded by the Government of Alberta to assist Albertans in achieving freedom from the harmful effects of alcohol, other drugs and gambling. For access to free, confidential services look in the white pages of your local telephone directory under Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, visit their website at **www.aadac.com** or call the toll-free, 24-hour AADAC Help Line at 1-866-33AADAC (1-866-332-2322)

Is anger management a problem for you?

Contact your family doctor for a referral to a counsellor or therapist in your area. Your local hospital may also be able to help, or try contacting your Regional Health Authority for assistance.

You can also refer to your yellow pages under Counselling Services for a list of professionals who may be able to help you.

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Having trouble collecting your wages from your employer or have another question about your rights as an employee?

The Employment Standards branch

The Employment Standards branch of Alberta Human Resources and Employment can help. If you want to know about employment standards for the payment of earnings such as overtime or holiday pay or if you need any information on your rights as an employee, give them a call or visit their website. You can also get a free copy of the Employment Standards Guide by phoning the office or visiting the website.

Phone: (780) 427-3731, toll-free within Alberta, dial 310-0000 and then 427-3731.
Website: **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/employmentstandards**

Do you belong to a union?

If yes, talk to your union representative about your concerns and discuss filing a grievance. The collective agreement should meet the minimum Employment Standards regulations but will also have information specific to your worksite. If you're not sure if you belong to a union or not, check your pay stub. If there are deductions for union dues, then you are represented by a union. Ask one of your co-workers for the name of the union and then look up its number in the yellow pages under "Labour Organizations".

Concerned your work site may be unsafe?

The Workplace Health and Safety program of Alberta Human Resources and Employment can help. Workplace Health and Safety helps employers and workers ensure safe, healthy and productive workplaces in Alberta. More than 200 free publications are available on the website or by phone request. You can also phone for confidential advice or to report workplace safety concerns.

Phone: 1-866-415-8690
Website: **www.whs.gov.ab.ca**

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Do you believe you're being sexually harassed or discriminated against?

The Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission can help. In Alberta, the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* protects Albertans from discrimination. A complaint must be made to the Commission within one year after the alleged incident. If you have questions about a specific situation or wish to make a human rights complaint, see the contact information below. Please note, due to confidentiality, the Commission cannot reply to complaints of discrimination via e-mail.

Confidential Inquiry Line:
To call toll-free within Alberta, dial 310-0000 and then enter the area code and the phone number.

Northern Regional Office (780) 427-7661
fax (780) 427-6013

Southern Regional Office (403) 297-6571
fax (403) 297-6567

TTY service for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing:
Edmonton (780) 427-1597
Calgary (403) 297-5639
Toll-free within Alberta 1-800-232-7215

For more information, visit the website at **www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca**

Not sure who to ask?

Contact Service Alberta toll-free at 310-0000 (anywhere in Alberta) if you have questions about Alberta Government programs and services. Phone lines are open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Monday to Friday) and voicemail is available after hours. Outside of Alberta, call long distance at (780) 427-2711. On-line information is available on the Service Alberta website at **www.servicealberta.ca**.

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Feedback

We'd like to hear from you...

Job Smart: Tips for staying employed **Date** _____

Did you find the information in this publication useful? _____ In what way?

How could we improve it?

Do you have any suggestions for other products that would be of value to you?

Would You Like to Receive a Catalogue of Our Products?

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

_____ Postal Code _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Please Return this Form to

People, Skills and Workplace Resources
Alberta Human Resources and Employment
12th floor, 10030 - 107 Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 3E4
Fax: 780-422-5319

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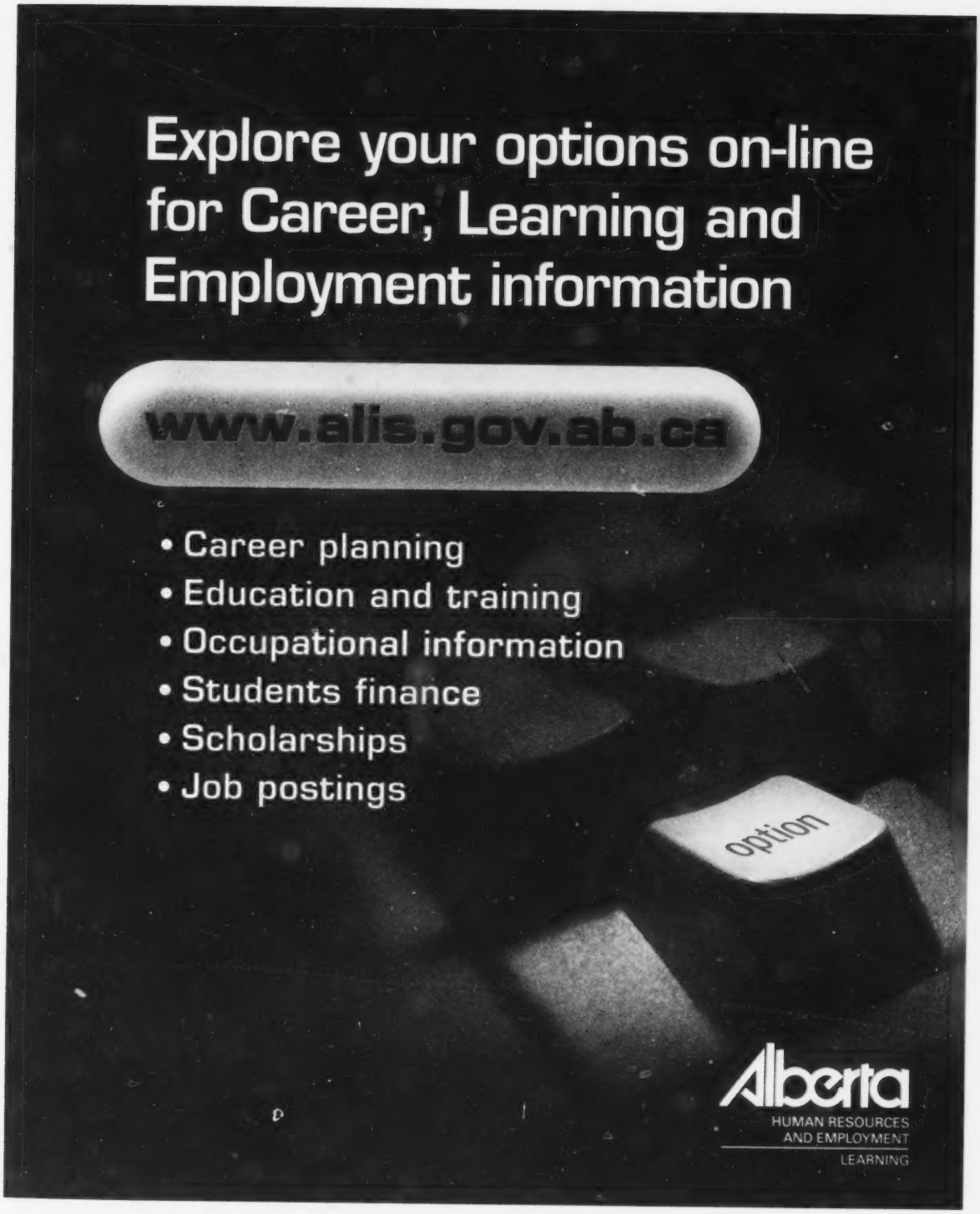
Notes

Notes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